

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Unlike St. Paul, whose preaching on Christ's sacrifice we've been hearing during this season of Lent, Matthew provides little analysis of the events he records in the Gospel. Matthew focuses on the actual event and not its implications. He functions rather as a reporter here, telling us the "who," "what," "when," and "where" of the last days of Jesus' ministry on earth—but not so much the "why."

The Nicene Creed supplies the "why" generally. The Lord Jesus Christ "for us men and for our salvation" did what He did, including being "crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate," suffering and being buried. Oh, what great love the Father has for fallen humanity! He sends His Son in human likeness and sends Him to the cross. St. John says it this way: "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (1 John 4:10).

And Christ obeyed. St. Paul says: "*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" Luther, preaching on this text, said, Jesus "'became lower than all men ... by submitting to a death which was the most ignominious, namely the death on the Cross; He died as an archknave above all knaves ... All this He did not do because we were worthy of it, but He did it because He was obedient to the Father' (St. L. XII:475)" (quoted in Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II:291).

Indeed, Jesus says, "*This [is the] charge I have received from my Father*" (John 10:18), namely, to "*[lay] down [my] life for the sheep*" (John 10:11). And again, the Son obeyed. This obedience is what is on display as we read of Jesus' passion today, but what kind of obedience is it? In catechism terms, we call it His passive obedience, for remember, Jesus said, "*No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord*" (John 10:18). And Jesus would tell Pilate, "*You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above*" (John 19:11).

In fact, Jesus came to this Passover for this very purpose. In this Passion account from St. Matthew today, Jesus says, "*You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.*" Jesus could have escaped from the clutches of the chief priests and Pharisees, had He wanted. He had done so on other occasions. But not this time, for it was time for Him to finish the task the Father had given Him. And so, He obeyed.

But it was not easy: "*My soul is very sorrowful, even to death,*" Jesus said. So great was His agony that St. Luke tells us, "*his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground*" (Luke 22:44).

Thus, He turned to prayer for strength, for it takes Divine strength to overcome human nature's desire to "choose the easy part" (LSB556:4). He prayed to the Father, "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*" And again, He prayed, "*My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*" There was no other way! And so, Jesus submitted to the Father's will. He obeyed.

And the rest of this Passion account is a recitation of Jesus' passive obedience. "*The hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*" "*Friend, do what you came to do.*" "*Put your sword back into its place. ... Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*" "*Many false witnesses came forward. ... 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' But Jesus remained silent.*" "*They spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?'*" But Jesus remained silent. "*When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer.*" When "*Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?'*", "*he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge.*"

The Roman soldiers knelt down before Him and "*mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spit on him and took [a] reed and struck him on the head.*" Still, Jesus said nothing. They nailed Jesus to the cross and lifted Him up to crucify Him. Not a word. Passersby "*derided him, wagging their heads ...*" The "*chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him ...*" Even "*the robbers who were crucified with him ... reviled him ...*," and He said nothing. St. Peter says, "*he was reviled, [but] he did not revile in return; ... he suffered, [but] he did not threaten.*" Rather, He kept "*entrusting himself to him who judges justly*" (1 Pet. 2:23).

Finally, alone on the cross, Jesus cried out again to God, the Scriptures having been fulfilled: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" He had done it; His obedience had done it. He had borne the world's sins and had atoned for them. The price had been paid—His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

The earth trembled, and even the Gentile soldier knew who was hanging now lifeless on that cross, who had let all this happen to Him: "*Truly this was the Son of God!*" In one more passive act, Jesus is taken down from the cross and buried in Joseph's tomb to await His exaltation.

Why did Jesus do it? Why this obedience? We are not worthy. It was because God loves us. It was "for us men and for our salvation."

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.